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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000886

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ABUJA WEEKLY REVIEW: MARCH 11-15, 2002

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d.)

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Northern Governors Protest National Identity Cards  
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1. (U) Electoral preparations were high on the agenda of the Northern Governors when they met this week. As a result of their discussions, the Governors issued a statement opposing the Federal Government's plan to use the proposed national identification card as the voter registration document. The Governors felt that making possession of the proposed ID card a prerequisite for voting would effectively disenfranchise many Northerners because large segments of the region's population were farmers in small isolated communities or were nomadic pastoralists. While many of these people might vote, they probably would not bother with the cumbersome process of obtaining an ID card, said critics of the I.D. Card proposal.

2. (C) Comment: The Governors' concerns mirror comments DAS Perry heard during a discussion with the Secretary General of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) in Kaduna on March 9. The ACF saw the identity card requirement as a conscious ploy by the Presidency to disenfranchise the North due to growing opposition in that region to Obasanjo's prospective Presidential candidacy. Many Northerners are also incensed about the price tag for the identity card exercise. The ACF claims that the government has allocated more in the FY-02 federal budget for the ID cards than for the entire agricultural sector, the lifeline of the Northern economy.

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APP TO SUE GOVERNMENT OVER INEC COMMISSIONERS  
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3. (C) Count the APP among those who suspect the Obasanjo Administration's electoral preparations are less than even-handed. APP National Chairman Yusuf Ali told reporters this week that his party would sue the Federal Government over the hiring of 34 Commissioners to replace the 34 Obasanjo fired several weeks ago. (Note: Obasanjo fired all but three of 37 INEC State Commissioners resident in the 36 States and Abuja. The Commissioners are the top INEC officials in their jurisdiction and are responsible for the preparation of the national election in their locales.) The APP head claimed that the suit was necessary because the new Commissioners were PDP partisans who could not be trusted to run impartial elections. (Comment: Many of the new Commissioners are PDP loyalists. In at least one state, a member of the PDP state executive was appointed to fill the INEC posts. It appears Obasanjo was within his legal rights to fire and hire commissioners; however, stacking the roster with cronies is not the way to instill confidence in the electoral process. End Comment.)

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Police and Military Do Not Strike; But Will Labor?  
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4. (SBU) The threatened police and military strikes did not take place March 11, as some anticipated. The Administration can take credit for nimbly dousing anger in the ranks of the police force by firing IGP Smith.

5. (C) However, strike talk has not totally abated. The National Labour Congress issued an ultimatum that it will call a general strike on May 1 -- International Labor Day -- if the Federal Government does not honor its promise to increase wages by 25 percent. In publicizing this ultimatum, the NLC leadership said labor had waited patiently, agreeing to the Government's request to forego the agreed-upon wage increase in 2001. However, much to Labour's chagrin, the payment for its patience was the fuel price increase at the beginning of the year. Now, Labour was insisting on the long overdue wage increase. (Comment: To a large degree, labor

is right; the Government has reneged on its promise. The Government is probably delaying, in large part, because the increase will inflate the budget deficit. NLC leader Adams Oshimole is still smarting from the Federal Government's shabby treatment of him when the Government stonewalled talks about the fuel price increase and successfully thwarted the attempted general strike in January. Oshimole probably does not want another confrontation with the Administration but must be seen as doing something to restore his and the NLC's credibility and diminished image. End comment.)

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Row Between The Presidency and The House Continues  
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16. (SBU) The Executive's relations with the House of Representatives remain contentious. During the week, the House opened hearings on the NITEL privatization sale. The sale, once hailed as the acme of GON reform efforts, is crumbling because bidders cannot obtain the financing needed to fund their \$ 1.317 billion bid. Clearly, the House wants to embarrass the Administration by rubbing its nose in this mire that a short time ago it touted as a major success. Even more symbolic of House-Executive acrimony, Speaker Na'Abba publicly accused the Presidency of plotting physical attacks against him and other House Members. Information Minister Jerry Gana has refuted Na'Abba's allegations. Additionally, the Presidency continues to investigate the House Members' salaries and emoluments, asserting that the Members will be asked to return any excess payments received. House Speaker Na'Abba is increasingly being mentioned as a possible Presidential candidate.

17. (C) Meanwhile, relations between the Senate and the Executive remain cooperative, due mainly to Senate President Anyim's close relationship with Obasanjo. For example, in recent weeks, the Senate has acted swiftly to all Presidential appointments when advice or consent was needed. However, this relationship may be put to a stress test if Anyim buckles to House pressure to hold a joint session on Obasanjo's Presidency similar to the debate held by the lower chamber in late January where that body criticized Obasanjo's performance as inept.  
Jeter